



## Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718

October 15, 2016

To: Governor's Office, Mike Volesky, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801  
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704  
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901  
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:  
    Director's Office      Parks Division      Lands Section      FWP Commissioners  
    Fisheries Division      Legal Unit      Wildlife Division      Design & Construction  
MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202  
MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103  
MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620  
James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624  
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624  
George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624  
Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771  
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624  
Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923  
Jack Jones, 3014 Irene St., Butte, MT 59701  
Jack Atcheson, 2309 Hancock Avenue, Butte MT 59701  
Beaverhead Conservation District, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725  
Big Hole Watershed Committee, P.O. Box 931, Butte, MT 59703  
Montana Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 7186, Missoula, MT 59807  
Dan Vermillion, FWP Commissioner, Livingston MT  
Earnest and Colleen Bacon, 2215 Fishtrap Creek Road, Wisdom, MT 59761  
Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, 730 N. Montana Street, Dillon, MT 59725-9424  
George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 563, Butte, MT 59703  
Skyline Sportsmen, P.O. Box 173, Butte, MT 59703  
Anaconda Sportsmen, 2 Cherry, Anaconda, MT 59711

Ladies and Gentlemen:

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for the restoration of westslope cutthroat trout to Cherry Creek near Melrose, MT in 2011. Cherry Creek was treated with rotenone in 2011 to remove non-native brook trout and hybridized cutthroat trout from the drainage beginning at its headwaters in Cherry and Granite lakes to a constructed fish barrier roughly 1.5 miles upstream from the confluence with the Big Hole River. In 2015 Cherry Creek was electrofished upstream of the fish barrier and brook trout were found. The presence of reproducing brook trout is a serious concern for cutthroat trout conservation because brook trout outcompete and displace native cutthroat trout. In the initial EA written for this project, it was stated that if brook trout were not completely removed in 2011, an additional treatment would be conducted in 2012. If non-native

trout persisted beyond 2012 a supplemental analysis would be performed, which is the purpose of this document.

It is believed that a small number of juvenile brook trout survived the initial treatment in 2011 in springs located on the National Forest. Spring areas can be problematic when removing fish from streams with piscicides because of their constant source of fresh water which can provide refuge for fish and limit exposure to applied piscicides. It appears that in Cherry Creek a small number (5-10) of juvenile brook trout (2 inch fish) survived the initial treatment in 2011 in the before mentioned springs. These fish have since grown and began to reproduce beginning in 2014 which resulted in juvenile fish being discovered in 2015. A total of 3 adult and 20 juvenile brook trout were captured in 2015. Since 2011 it has become the accepted practice for rotenone projects in streams to treat consecutive years. A natural fish barrier is present in Cherry Creek roughly 7 miles upstream of the constructed fish barrier and about 3 miles downstream of Cherry and Granite lakes. This barrier historically precluded any upstream brook trout passage and only hybridized cutthroat trout were present upstream. Testing was done in 2016 upstream of this natural barrier and no brook trout were present so there will be no need to treat the stream or lakes upstream of this point. FWP is proposing to treat the portion of Cherry Creek where brook trout were found in 2015 to the fish barrier beginning in 2016 and again in 2017 or until non-native fish are completely removed from the stream upstream of the constructed fish barrier.

The EA was released for public comment on 10/3/16 for 2 weeks and advertized in Butte Standard and Dillon Weekly newspapers and no comments were received.

It is my decision to move forward with the proposed westslope cutthroat restoration in Cherry Creek.

Questions regarding these Decision Notices should be mailed to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Cherry Creek Supplemental EA  
Attn: Jim Olsen  
1820 Meadowlark Ln.  
Butte, MT 59701

Or e-mailed to: [jimolsen@mt.gov](mailto:jimolsen@mt.gov)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Sheppard', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Sam B. Sheppard  
Region Three Supervisor

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE

Supplemental Environmental Assessment for Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Cherry Creek, Big Hole River

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Region 3, Bozeman  
10-17-16

### **Proposed Action**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing to conduct a subsequent fish removal on Cherry Creek near Melrose, MT. An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for the restoration of westslope cutthroat trout to Cherry Creek near Melrose, MT in 2011. Cherry Creek was treated with rotenone in 2011 to remove non-native brook trout and hybridized cutthroat trout from the drainage beginning at its headwaters in Cherry and Granite lakes to a constructed fish barrier roughly 1.5 miles upstream from the confluence with the Big Hole River. In 2105 Cherry Creek was electrofished upstream of the fish barrier and brook trout were found. The presence of reproducing brook trout is a serious concern for cutthroat trout conservation because brook trout outcompete and displace native cutthroat trout. In the initial EA written for this project it was stated if brook trout were not completely removed in 2011 an additional treatment would be conducted in 2012. If non-native trout persisted beyond 2012 a supplemental analysis would be performed, which is the purpose of this document.

### **Montana Environmental Policy Act**

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared by FWP for the proposed project and released September 30, 2016 for a two-week public comment period. The draft EA was titled: Supplemental Environmental Assessment for Westslope Cutthroat Trout Restoration in Cherry Creek, Big Hole River. The draft EA was circulated to a standard FWP Region 3 contact list and was also posted and remains available for viewing on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices>.

### **Summary of Public Comment and FWP response**


No public comments were received during the two-week EA review period ending August 12, 2016.

**Final Environmental Assessment for the EA titled:** Supplemental Environmental Assessment for Westslope Cutthroat Trout Restoration in Cherry Creek, Big Hole River. There are no further modifications necessary to the Draft Environmental Assessment based on public comment. The updated Environmental Assessment, together with this Decision Notice, will serve as the final document for this proposal.

**Decision**

Based on the Environmental assessment, public comment, and the need to conserve Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Cherry Creek, FWP's decision is to proceed with the proposed cutthroat trout conservation action.

I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Sheppard', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Sam B. Sheppard  
Region Three Supervisor